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Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People

283rd meeting

Monday, 29 November 2004, 10.30 a.m.

New York

Chairman: Mr. Badji ..... (Senegal)

The meeting was called to order at 10.45 a.m.

International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People

The Chairman (*spoke in French*): Today, the Committee is holding a solemn meeting to observe the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, in accordance with the provisions of General Assembly resolution 32/40 B of 2 December 1977.

It is my honour and pleasure to welcome Mr. Jean Ping, President of the General Assembly; Mr. Kofi Annan, the Secretary-General of the United Nations; Mr. Bernard Goonetilleke, Chairman of the Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of the Palestinian People and Other Arabs of the Occupied Territories; Mr. Farouk Kaddoumi, head of the Political Department of the Palestine Liberation Organization and representative of Palestine at this ceremony, and Mr. Tuliameni Kalomoh, Assistant Secretary-General for Political Affairs.

I also wish to welcome representatives of Member States, intergovernmental organizations and civil society organizations and all those who have accepted the Committee's invitation to participate in this solemn meeting.

The recent passing of the Chairman of the Executive Committee of the Palestine Liberation Organization and President of the Palestinian Authority, Yasser Arafat, has deeply saddened us. His death is a tragic loss for the Palestinian people and for all suffering peoples and whose profound aspirations for dignity and freedom he personified. I would now like to invite everyone present to rise and observe a minute of silence in memory of President Arafat and all those who have given their lives for the cause of the Palestinian people and for the return of peace in the region.

The members of the Committee observed a minute of silence.

The Chairman (*spoke in French*): Allow me to make a statement on behalf of the Committee.

It is my great honour, for the first time in my capacity as Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, to welcome on this International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian people, representatives of Member States, United Nations organs and bodies, intergovernmental organizations and civil society organizations. I sincerely thank all of you, who have responded in such great numbers to the Committee's invitation. Your sizeable presence at this commemorative ceremony is proof that the international community remains determined to work towards the achievement by the Palestinian people of their inalienable rights.

This year the observance of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People takes place in particularly trying times for the Palestinian people. In addition to the extremely difficult situation in the

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occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, the Palestinian people mourn the loss of their leader of long standing, Yasser Arafat, Chairman of the Executive Committee of the Palestine Liberation Organization and President of the Palestinian Authority. Palestine has lost one of its best sons, and the Palestinian people have lost one of the most fervent militants for their just cause, an invincible fighter, an exceptional strategist, a convincing orator and a charismatic and visionary leader who, for many decades, was a living symbol of their courage and of their tenacity, resistance and unity. At the same time he embodied their legitimate aspirations for self-determination, freedom, sovereignty and national independence.

Yasser Arafat's life was closely related to the very reason for which we have gathered today in this Chamber. As the Committee is well aware, it was on this same day in 1947 that the General Assembly adopted resolution 181 (II), which terminated the Mandate for Palestine and stipulated the formation of two States — one Jewish and the other Arab, with Jerusalem to be placed under a special international regime. The State of Israel was proclaimed without delay the following year, in 1948, but the Arab State, which was to be home to the Palestinians, has still not come into being.

The Palestinian people have had to endure long years characterized by warfare, expulsion and occupation. It was Yasser Arafat who emerged, in the course of the 1960s, as a Palestinian leader and gave the disenfranchised Palestinians an identity the world could no longer ignore. As the leader of his people, he made known the tragic plight of the Palestinians, which became a source of great concern for all peace-loving peoples.

The Palestinian leadership is determined to continue along that path and can rest assured that the Committee will support all efforts to resume the political dialogue with Israel and to pave the way for the implementation of the measures laid out in the road map.

Unfortunately, the realities on the ground and the situation in the occupied Palestinian territory show no sign of improvement, and the crisis has reached alarming proportions. In the course of this year, the Government of Israel has intensified its military raids, particularly in the Gaza Strip, resulting in an unprecedented level of destruction of homes and infrastructure, and in a rapidly rising number of civilian deaths and injuries.

Every day Palestinian civilians living under Israeli occupation face harassment, violence, deprivation and humiliation. Severe restrictions on their day-to-day activities hamper their ability to make a living and take care of their families. The severe damage inflicted on Gaza's agriculture, the main source of income for the population there, will take years to reverse.

The death toll since the start of the intifada is now more than 4,000. Most of those killed have been Palestinians, but hundreds of Israelis have also lost their lives. Tragically, the number of victims among Palestinian women and children, the most vulnerable members of Palestinian society, is increasing. More than 670 children have been killed in the past four years of the intifada, of which over 570 were Palestinian and over 100 were Israeli. Palestinian women, in particular, bear the heavy responsibility of taking care of their families. Many of their menfolk have been killed or put in prison, or are stranded in long queues at checkpoints when they try to get to or return from work.

The Palestinian economy remains in a dismal state. Restrictions on movement have increased substantially this year. Unemployment in Gaza and in the West Bank remains high. Unless protective measures are taken without delay, poverty is likely to increase further. Food security, health and educational standards, water quality and sanitation all have deteriorated.

It is a matter of utmost concern that the expansion of settlements goes on. The international community has been particularly critical of the continued construction of the wall, which is asphyxiating and dividing Palestinian communities and where the majority of residents have lost homes, farmland and easy access to jobs, schools and medical care.

Once again, the Committee welcomes the advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice, which found that the construction of the wall being built by Israel, which encroaches to a very large extent on occupied Palestinian territory, including in and around East Jerusalem, and its associated regimes were contrary to international law, and that the construction

of the wall severely impeded the exercise by the Palestinian people of their right to self-determination.

Our Committee strongly urges Israel to comply with international law, including all relevant United Nations resolutions. Adherence to the rules and principles of international law is a sine qua non condition for a negotiated solution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

The Committee expresses the firm hope that the Quartet and the international community will intensify their engagement to help the parties to commence implementing their obligations under the road map, which provides for a practical way to achieve a comprehensive, just and lasting settlement of the question of Palestine. Such a settlement must be based on Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973), 1397 (2002) and 1515 (2003) and on the principle of a permanent two-State solution to the conflict, based on pre-1967 borders, the realization of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people and the right of all States to live in peace and security. The international community must now insist that Israel take the necessary measures to enable the full participation of the Palestinian from the occupied territories, including East Jerusalem, in the upcoming Palestinian elections.

On behalf of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, let me welcome the participation in this solemn meeting of all of the senior officials of the United Nations, especially that of Secretary-General Kofi Annan, to whom I would like once again to express the Committee's deep appreciation for his unwavering support of the peace process. Mr. Secretary-General, I express to you once again my most positive appreciation of your active role in relaunching and revitalizing the work of the Quartet.

I also warmly welcome Mr. Jean Ping, President of the General Assembly at its fifty-ninth session, and sincerely thank him for honouring today's meeting with his presence.

To the representatives of United Nations Member States and observers and to the representatives of the Organization of the Islamic Conference, the League of Arab States, the African Union and the Non-Aligned Movement, I express my deep appreciation for their presence at this solemn meeting and for the unwavering support of their organizations for the Committee and for the search for a comprehensive, just and lasting settlement of the question of Palestine.

I also take this opportunity to express the Committee's appreciation for the remarkable work accomplished by the devoted personnel of the agencies, bodies, funds and programmes of the United Nations system, such as the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, the United Nations Development Programme, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs and the United Nations Children's Fund, among others.

Finally, I wish especially to note the presence among us of Ms. Jennifer Butler, Chairperson of the Non-Governmental Organization Working Group on Israel/Palestine, who is representing the International Coordinating Network on Palestine. Through her, I thank the numerous civil society organizations for their effective voluntary work in support of the Palestinian people and the Palestinian cause.

May we all find in this demonstration of solidarity with the Palestinian people the motivation and the strength needed to persevere in our search for a peaceful, comprehensive, just and lasting solution to the question of Palestine, based on international law.

I now have the honour and the pleasure to give the floor to the President of the General Assembly, Mr. Jean Ping.

Mr. Ping (Gabon), President of the General Assembly (*spoke in French*): This year, the commemoration of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People takes place in an atmosphere of sadness because of the passing of Yasser Arafat, President of the Palestinian Authority, to whom the General Assembly paid solemn tribute on Thursday, 11 November.

A man of humility and courage, a Nobel Peace Prize laureate and a beloved leader of his people, Yasser Arafat bequeathed a great heritage: his passion and ideal to create an independent Palestinian State. Now it is incumbent upon the Palestinian people and the entire international community to continue his efforts to create an independent Palestinian State in the spirit of the Oslo Agreements. Today, 29 November, is thus also a day of hope. As Yasser Arafat once stated, peace, and the choice of peace, are the objective of our struggle because it is impossible to resolve this conflict by military means. Today, it is useful to bear those

words in mind, because violence in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict continues to destabilize the entire Middle East region, with its heavy toll of innocent victims on both sides.

In order to bring both sides back to the negotiating table and find a political settlement to a conflict that has been dividing them for more than half a century, we must break this vicious circle of violence, vengeance and despair. It is generally acknowledged that the road map remains the only way to break the current impasse and to resume political dialogue in accordance with the relevant United Nations resolutions and based on the principle of land for peace and a solution providing for two States, Israel and Palestine, living side by side in peace, within secure and internationally recognized borders. I should like to recall that the General Assembly continues to encourage both sides to carry out their obligations under the road map.

I should also like to take this opportunity to congratulate you, Mr. Chairman, and the other members of the Committee on your tireless efforts to promote the exercise of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people and to work to find a just and lasting solution to the question of Palestine, of which the General Assembly will begin its consideration this afternoon.

The General Assembly reaffirms its position that the United Nations should continue to support efforts to relaunch dialogue between the parties. That objective requires determination and, in particular, real and strong political will. Israelis and Palestinians can be certain that the international community will support them in this crucial and courageous endeavour finally to establish peace in the Middle East. We must ensure that this objective is attained. I believe that would be the best possible tribute we could pay to President Arafat.

The Chairman: I now have the honour and the pleasure to give the floor to the Secretary-General, His Excellency Mr. Kofi Annan.

The Secretary-General: I am pleased to join the Committee on this International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People and take this opportunity to express, once again, my sympathy to the Palestinian people, who are mourning the loss of their leader, the late President Arafat. Let us hope that his memory will be an inspiration to the Palestinian people at this difficult time so that they may remain united and strengthened in their efforts to realize their national aspirations for statehood and self-determination though peaceful means.

Over the past four years, bloodshed and chaos in the Middle East have continued without respite. Palestinians have endured a dismal existence of grinding poverty and dispossession. But they have not been good years for Israelis, either. They too have borne great loss. They too need security. The past four years have demonstrated all too clearly that violence only begets violence and pushes farther away the prospect of a peaceful solution to the conflict.

However, we must not give way to despair and pessimism. Today, throughout the world, people hope that a new chance for peace may be around the corner. We must not let it pass by. The international community must gather its strength and renew its commitment to work for a reinvigorated peace process. Following the recent Quartet meeting in Sharm el Sheikh, I am hopeful that it will be so.

The Quartet's Road Map still embodies a path to peace that is accepted by both Palestinians and Israelis and is strongly supported by the international community. It is high time that it be given a chance to succeed, and that the parties begin to live up to their commitments under it. And I have expressed my hope that Israel's disengagement plan will revive peace efforts based on the Road Map, leading to the end of the occupation of the West Bank, including East Jerusalem and the Gaza Strip, and paving the way for a sovereign, democratic and contiguous Palestinian State, living side by side in peace with a secure Israel.

For my part, I pledge to continue my work to support the parties and to continue our work with all the parties for a comprehensive, just and lasting settlement of the question of Palestine, based on Security Council resolutions and on the principle of land for peace.

The President (*spoke in French*): I thank the Secretary-General, His Excellency Mr. Kofi Annan, for the important statement he has just made. We are grateful to him for the efforts he personally has been making in order to promote a comprehensive, just and lasting solution to the question of Palestine and for his constant concern for the work of the Committee.

I now call on the Permanent Observer of Palestine to the United Nations, His Excellency Mr. Nasser Al-Kidwa, who will read a message from the Chairman of the Executive Committee of the Palestine Liberation Organization, His Excellency Mr. Mahmoud Abbas.

Mr. Al-Kidwa (*spoke in Arabic*): For many years I was honoured to convey messages to this meeting from the President and leader of the Palestinian people, Yasser Arafat. I would like here to express the deep gratitude and appreciation of the Palestinian people for the kind words that we have heard today from the international community.

After the passing away of our leader, peaceful transfer of power is occurring in accordance with Palestinian law and the principles of democracy. Part of that process has already taken place, while other parts of the process have yet to be carried out, namely, the holding of presidential and legislative elections.

Today I am pleased and honoured to convey to the Committee the message of Mr. Mahmoud Abbas, the Chairman of the Executive Committee of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO). Before I read that message, I would like simply to express my appreciation for the presence of the President of the Security Council in this meeting in conformity with a tradition established in 1978. We consider the presence of the President of the Security Council as a representation of the Security Council and not of his country's national authorities. We thus look forward to the arrival of the President of the Security Council. Allow me now, Sir, to read the message from Mr. Mahmoud Abbas to this meeting:

"On behalf of the Palestinian people, the Palestine Liberation Organization and on my own behalf, allow me to convey to the Committee our warmest greetings and heartfelt wishes on the occasion of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian people.

"The General Assembly, on 2 December 1977, determined that this day should be commemorated annually as the International Day of Solidarity with the just struggle of our Palestinian people. This day reflects the just cause of our people and their inalienable rights to freedom and independence. It is a rejection of injustice and the occupation and colonialism that continue to prevent our people from regaining and exercising their inalienable rights, which have been affirmed by numerous resolutions of international legitimacy and which until now remain unimplemented.

"In that regard, we highly value the tireless efforts undertaken by Mr. Kofi Annan, Secretary-General of the United Nations, aimed at achieving peace, freedom and independence for our people. We also express our gratitude to the Chairman of the Committee, for leading the tireless effort to achieve that noble goal. Those efforts are most highly appreciated. We also extend our thanks to all the kings, emirs, presidents and leaders of the States of the world who have expressed their unwavering and sincere solidarity with our Palestinian people for the attainment of their liberation and independence.

"This year, the commemoration of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People has a particular significance as our people in Palestine are experiencing widespread sorrow due to the passing away of our leader and symbol, President Yasser Arafat, who always carried in his conscience the worries of that people. He struggled with perseverance and steadfastness for over half a century in order to achieve the noble goals, honour, dignity and freedom of our people and to raise the name of Palestine in all international forums. Indeed, the question of Palestine gained recognition at all regional and international levels and President Arafat's name and Palestine became synonymous. He was a messenger of the peace to which he courageously extended his hand and which he vigorously struggled to achieve. His courage, resolve, and convictions were never weakened or shaken. He was brave in making decisions, which he called making the 'peace of the brave' because of his conviction that only brave leaders can make such peace.

"The Palestinian people and leadership have shown their ability to respond to this tragic loss in a civilized and orderly manner, which is reflected in the smooth and peaceful transition of power and authority in accordance with our basic laws after President Arafat's passing. Today, more than ever before, the Palestinian people and leadership urgently need the support of the Council and the support of all friends of freedom,

justice, peace and democracy around the world, who should strengthen and mobilize solidarity with the Palestinian people and extend all kinds of assistance to them to help them to endure and get through this delicate and critical stage in the region. That support is necessary to allow them to reconstruct their vital institutions and resuscitate their national economy; to attain their inalienable and legitimate right to self determination in their land, Palestine; and to implement the Declaration of Independence, which was adopted in Algiers in 1988 for a free, independent, sovereign and viable State of Palestine.

"In that regard, we also look forward to the Committee's assistance in ensuring the appropriate environment conducive to holding our presidential elections on 9 January 2005 with transparency, honesty, democracy and the participation of all our people who are registered to vote, including our sons and daughters in occupied East Jerusalem.

"Justice and logic necessitate that each party comply with its obligations to achieve the necessary calm and the full and mutual enforcement of a ceasefire, including the withdrawal of the Israeli army to the lines prior to 28 September 2000, in order to provide the necessary platform for the implementation of the road map and the two-State solution and to resume final status negotiations, which deal with important and sensitive issues that require every faithful effort and the truest of intentions.

"We look forward to the Committee's continued support for the just Palestinian position, which is founded on right and the resolutions of international legitimacy and international law. On our part, we will continue to extend our hands in the pursuit of peace and to commit ourselves, as we have done in the past, to the peace process and its terms of reference, embodied in Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 425 (1978); the principle of land for peace; General Assembly resolution 194 (III), which determines the international solution for the question of Palestine refugees; the signed agreements and the necessary implementation of all obligations.

"Consistent with the Palestinian position, based on right and justice, we reject all unilateral measures and call for their immediate cessation, as they affect final status issues and unilaterally and militarily predetermine the final outcome. In that regard, we refer in particular to the unilateral plan for withdrawal from Gaza and the ongoing construction of the separation wall and the settlements in the West Bank and East Jerusalem, which contravene international law, resolutions of international legitimacy and the Fourth Geneva Convention. All such policies undermine and destroy the peace process because peace, settler colonialism and the building of the apartheid wall are in absolute opposition to each other. We need to build bridges of peace, good-neighbourliness and mutual respect, and not walls of separation, apartheid, hatred and malice. In that regard, we also continue vigorously to reject the Judaization of Al-Quds Al-Sharif and its isolation from its surroundings.

"We call upon the Committee and all members of the international community to support our just pleas to put an end to the injustice, occupation and colonization of our land and our holy places; to ensure that all steps are taken in coordination with the Palestinian people and their leadership, a real and actual partner in the peace process; and not to endorse the policy of unilateral measures that only intensify and compound the complexity of that grave situation and do not contribute to the achievement of peace or to bringing an end to the ongoing crisis.

"The support and solidarity of our dear brothers and friends on the Committee at this time are of the utmost importance to us. They will assist us in overcoming the crisis and impasse and strengthen our position and sincere efforts towards the achievement of a just, lasting and comprehensive peace — a peace that is based on right, justice, equality, mutual respect, coexistence and creative cooperation and that guarantees security and stability to all peoples and States in the region and freedom and independence for our Palestinian people to end all of the suffering, pain and oppression they have borne. That peace will herald a bright new chapter and era of coexistence and cooperation in the region, in which hope, security, safety, good-

neighbourliness and cooperation can flourish, promising a better future to all generations to come.

"The United Nations has a historic and ethical responsibility with regard to the question of Palestine and it has certainly assumed its responsibility. It has played and continues to play an important and distinctive role as it has embraced and advocated the rights of our Palestinian people. That has recently been manifested in the adoption of a number of important resolutions, especially the advisory opinion rendered on 9 July 2004 by the International Court of Justice on the illegality of the occupation of Palestinian territory and the necessity of halting the construction of the separation wall, a most important ruling we deeply appreciate.

"The opinion was followed by the adoption by the General Assembly of resolution ES-10/15 on 20 July 2004 in support of the advisory opinion, which called for a cessation of the construction of the wall in the occupied Palestinian territory in the West Bank, including in and around East Jerusalem, the dismantling of the existing parts of the wall and reparations for all damages inflicted upon the Palestinian people as a result of the wall. It is also imperative to refer to Security Council resolution 1515 (2003) concerning the implementation of the road map and unanimous support for it, in addition to other important relevant resolutions that Israel refuses to comply with, as it has done with all previous resolutions. It has instead persisted in its intransigence, aggression and destructive war, suffocating and besieging our people and destroying their institutions, infrastructure and livelihoods.

"The time has come for that aggression and siege against our people and land to end, for they do not in any way contribute to the achievement of the desired peace and security, but rather accelerate the deterioration of the situation and intensify the bloodshed and the spiral of violence.

"In conclusion, we reiterate our profound gratitude to Secretary-General Kofi Annan for his dedicated efforts to achieve peace and for his noble stance, which was recently demonstrated by the lowering of the United Nations flag to half staff in mourning for our late President Yasser Arafat and the convening of a solemn memorial session of the General Assembly to pay tribute to our late President. We also extend our thanks to all members and the President of the General Assembly for their constant efforts, their unwavering and sincere solidarity with our people, and their support for them in their effort to achieve their national rights in their homeland, Palestine, and to establish an independent State with East Jerusalem as its capital. We are also grateful to all our friends and the world's free and peace-loving nations and peoples who have stood by our people in their just march towards the achievement of a peace of the brave, which we all aspire to achieve and under which all will live in security, stability and tranquillity and the ravages of war, destruction and violence will come to an end."

The Chairman (*spoke in French*): On behalf of us all, I wish to reiterate to Mr. Abbas our solidarity with the Palestinian people during this time of trial. I also assure him and, through him, the Palestinian people of the firm commitment of our Committee to pursue its efforts, as mandated by the General Assembly, to promote a comprehensive, just and lasting settlement of the question of Palestine.

I now call on the President of the Security Council.

Mr. Danforth (United States of America), President of the Security Council: First, I would like to thank the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People for inviting me, in my capacity as President of the Security Council for the month of November, to participate in the annual commemoration of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People. This is a day of remembrance and compassion for all those who suffer from the terrible conflict and a day when the international community renews its commitment to relentlessly pursue efforts for a comprehensive and lasting settlement in the Middle East. Above all, this is a day of hope that peace will prevail and that the vision of two States, Israel and Palestine, living side by side in peace and security will be realized.

Over the past year, the Security Council has continued to support a comprehensive and just

settlement in the Middle East, based on Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 1397 (2002), the foundations of the Madrid Conference, the principle of land for peace and the agreements already arrived at by the parties. The Security Council has also continued to follow the work of the Quartet and to advocate implementation of the performance-based road map, which was officially submitted to the parties on 30 April 2003. On 19 November 2003, the Security Council adopted resolution 1515 (2003), endorsing the road map for a permanent two-State solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The Council called on the parties to comply with their obligations pursuant to the road map in cooperation with the Quartet.

The Security Council keeps the situation in the region under constant review. We have monthly briefings by the Secretary-General and by his Personal Representative and Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process. The Council has noted with concern the ongoing violence, terrorism and destruction, which has resulted in a tragic loss of life on both sides. It has also been concerned with the stalemate in the peace process and the economic and humanitarian situation on the ground. The deterioration in the security situation — particularly suicide bombings in Israel and military operations on Palestinian territory — is one of the main preoccupations of the Council. In its resolution 1515 (2003), the Council expressed grave concern over the continuation of tragic and violent events in the Middle East and reiterated its demand for an immediate cessation to all acts of violence, including all acts of terrorism, provocation, incitement and destruction.

The Council is fully aware of the seriousness of the humanitarian crisis on the ground. Restrictions on freedom of movement continue to hamper everyday life for the people and strangle the Palestinian economy. Easing those restrictions on movement will enable humanitarian assistance to reach those people who desperately need it, and would improve living conditions for the Palestinians.

The donor community should be as generous as possible in its assistance to the Palestinians. The Council welcomes the commitment of the ad hoc liaison committee of the donor community.

The Security Council is also fully aware of the complexity of the task of achieving a lasting and just settlement of the decades-old conflict in the Middle East. That settlement will require constant efforts by the international community and by the parties involved. In this regard, the Council will continue to support the tireless peace efforts of Secretary-General Kofi Annan, whose political authority and moral prestige are invaluable assets for the international community as it continues to seek a peaceful settlement in the region.

The Council appreciates the constructive role played by the members of the Quartet and the international community. It also appreciates the quiet work of bilateral diplomacy in the quest for peace and stability in the Middle East.

Nevertheless, primary responsibility for the final settlement lies, above all, with the parties concerned. The elected Palestinian Cabinet and the Government of Israel must work together to overcome obstacles to the peace process. The Council stands ready to assist the parties in this challenging endeavour.

The Council notes that the Secretary-General has expressed condolences on the death of Yasser Arafat. We welcome the decision to hold presidential elections in January 2005 and support the Palestinians in their efforts to advance the democratic process.

In conclusion, I would like to assure the Committee that the Security Council will continue to shoulder its responsibilities under the Charter and will remain fully committed to the ultimate goal of achieving a just and lasting peace in the Middle East and the fulfilment of the legitimate aspirations of the Palestinian people to a sovereign, prosperous and democratic State.

The Chairman (*spoke in French*): I would like to thank the President of the Security Council, Mr. John Danforth, for his important statement.

I shall now suspend the meeting for several minutes to allow some of our guests to leave the Chamber.

On behalf of the Committee, I once again thank the President of the General Assembly, the Secretary-General, the President of the Security Council and the Permanent Observer of Palestine for their statements.

The meeting was suspended at 11.40 a.m. and resumed at 11.45 a.m.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to Ambassador Bernard Goonatilleke of Sri

Lanka, Chairman of the Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of the Palestinian People and Other Arabs of the Occupied Territories.

Mr. Goonatilleke (Sri Lanka), Chairman of the Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of the Palestinian People and Other Arabs of the Occupied Territories: On the occasion of this solemn meeting in observance of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, I have the honour to address this gathering in my capacity as Chairman of the Special Committee established by the General Assembly to investigate Israeli practices affecting the human rights of the Palestinian people and other Arabs of the occupied territories.

First of all, on behalf of the Special Committee, I wish to express our deep sympathy and sincere and heartfelt condolences to the Palestinian people upon the untimely passing of President Yasser Arafat on 11 November 2004. For decades, the late President Arafat steadfastly epitomized the inextinguishable quest of the Palestinian people for a sovereign and independent State: the State of Palestine. He will be long remembered not only by the Palestinian people, to whose service he devoted much of his life, but also by peoples of other countries both near and far, with whom he interacted closely in the pursuit of his lifelong mission. In these difficult days, it is the sincere hope of the Special Committee that the Palestinian people, as well as their leadership, will commit themselves to resolutely pursuing their objective peacefully through negotiations.

While the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People was established by the General Assembly in 1975, the Special Committee was established in 1968, in the aftermath of the hostilities that took place in June 1967. Those two Committees, since their inception 29 and 36 years ago respectively, have carried out their mandates and submitted reports to the General Assembly on an annual basis. It is most regrettable that, just as the numerous resolutions of the General Assembly and the Security Council pertaining to the question of the Middle East have remained unimplemented, the recommendations of the two Committees have also shared the same fate. Meanwhile, despite the occasional silver lining which has appeared among the dark clouds, the situation regarding the Middle East conflict seems to be stagnating, with no sign of improvement on the horizon.

Unfortunately, this year, as in the past, the Special Committee was not allowed by the Government of Israel to visit the occupied territories to observe the human rights situation there or to have direct contact with the Israeli authorities. The Committee nevertheless undertook its annual field mission, from 25 May to 8 June, to Lebanon, Egypt and Syria. It visited Lebanon for the first time with a view to broadening its knowledge and understanding of the problems that have been faced by the Palestinian refugees in that country for many decades. The Special Committee met with 84 witnesses in all — the highest number ever — in the three countries it visited. It gathered sufficient evidence to express its serious concern at the severely deteriorating human rights and humanitarian situation and at the unprecedented level of destruction taking place in the occupied territories.

Most witnesses from the West Bank and the Gaza Strip highlighted the appalling and deteriorating living conditions resulting from the relentless military incursions by the Israel Defence Forces and from the construction of the separation wall in the northern West Bank. Palestinian land had been confiscated, cultivated fields had been destroyed, dwellings had been razed to the ground and families and communities had been split. Farmers had been denied access to their land, workers to their jobs, children and youth to schools, colleges and universities, and women and children to basic health and social services.

The construction of the wall — in contravention of international law, as declared in the advisory opinion rendered by the International Court of Justice in July 2004 — was causing major changes to the social fabric of Palestinian communities and was one of the most visible signs of oppression. Some witnesses expressed the fear that the purpose of erecting the wall and the moving of its contours far away from the Green Line — in some areas penetrating as much as 22 kilometres into the occupied territory — went far beyond security concerns and seemed to be aimed at annexing Palestinian land for settlement purposes.

Witnesses also highlighted the fact that every movement from one village or city to another, or even within neighbourhoods, required a special permit. Frequent road closures and numerous checkpoints,

numbering more than 600 between the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, added hours of driving or walking.

Extrajudicial killings continued, taking the lives not only of the leaders of militant groups, but also of children — some while on their way to school or even while attending classes. During the military operations at Rafah, in particular, about 40 children died between January and May 2004. A number of witnesses asserted that children under 12 years of age were deliberately being targeted by the Israeli military or snipers. Testimonies also referred to the worsening detention conditions of Palestinians held in Israeli jails: no family visits; scarce legal assistance; persistent abuse — especially during the initial period of arrest; and an intensification of the methods of torture.

Owing to the construction of the wall, many villages in rural areas in the northern West Bank no longer had access to hospital facilities located in cities and did not have basic health care in their local communities. Several witnesses reported that ambulances ran great risks while waiting at the gates to cross through the wall. Medical personnel were abducted, beaten up or taken into custody by the Israeli military. During the Rafah incidents, 28 ambulances were reportedly destroyed by the Israeli military and a number of volunteer ambulance staff also died.

According to some sources of information, more than 1,100 houses were totally or partially demolished in the Gaza Strip during the period January to May 2004, especially in Rafah and the refugee camps near the Egyptian border. Some 29,000 people were allegedly forced to take refuge in temporary premises made available to them by United Nations agencies such as the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) or by international humanitarian institutions such as the International Committee of the Red Cross.

People also suffered from a sharp increase in unemployment. The renewed policy of demolishing houses, combined with the heavy destruction of municipal infrastructure, roads and bridges, civilian institutions, such as government offices, police stations, prisons, banks, hospitals, clinics, schools and non-governmental organization properties, was perceived as a persistent collective punishment and a humiliation imposed on the Palestinian population. Those steps will impede recovery for a long time to come.

Finally, the Special Committee assessed the ongoing deterioration of the human rights situation in the occupied Syrian Golan. According to official information, the current population of 20,000, inhabiting 44 Jewish settlements there, was expected to further increase by an additional 15,000 settlers over the next three years, following a decision taken by the Israeli authorities on 1 January 2004. The alleged storage of Israeli nuclear waste in a tract of land close to the Syrian border was another development of the utmost concern to the Syrian authorities.

Three positive developments are likely to bring a glimmer of hope to what has been seen as a very uncertain future for the Palestinian people. One is the renewed genuine interest taken by the international media in reporting on the harsh military occupation of the occupied territories and on the plight of its people. The second is the growing influence exercised by major segments of public opinion in some countries in alerting, and advocating among, their respective constituencies with regard to the complexity of the Palestinian issue and the need to resolve the situation now. The last development is the combined effects of the advisory opinion rendered by the International Court of Justice, the Israeli decision to withdraw from the Gaza Strip in 2005 and the evolving dynamic situation in the occupied Palestinian territories, which have focused the world attention on the Palestinian issue once again.

Let us hope that the recent changes will encourage all parties concerned to seek a negotiated settlement in a spirit of compromise so that one day, as highlighted by some witnesses, Palestinians and Israelis will be able to live side by side in peace, security and dignity in their own independent and sovereign States.

The Chairman (*spoke in French*): I thank Mr. Bernard Goonatilleke for his statement.

I now give the floor to the Permanent Representative of Malaysia, Mr. Rastam Mohd Isa, who will read out a message from the Prime Minister of Malaysia, His Excellency Dato' Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, in his capacity as Chairman of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries.

Mr. Rastam (Malaysia): I have the honour to read out a message from The Honourable Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, Prime Minister of Malaysia and Chairman of the Non-Aligned Movement, on the

occasion of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, which we are commemorating today, 29 November 2004. The message reads as follows:

"On the occasion of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, I have the honour, on behalf of the people of Malaysia and as Chairman of the Non-Aligned Movement, to extend our warmest greetings to all our Palestinian brothers and sisters and express our solidarity with them. On this solemn occasion, the Non-Aligned Movement reaffirms its steadfast support and longstanding solidarity with the Palestinian people and their leadership in their longstanding quest for the full realization of their inalienable rights, including their right to self-determination, and to become masters of their own destiny in a State which they can call their own.

"We observe this day today with a feeling of great loss and sorrow at the passing away, just 19 days ago, of President Yasser Arafat, a visionary, an exceptional leader, and the absolute personification of the Palestinian struggle for a homeland. We shall certainly miss him, as do our Palestinian brothers and sisters, who grieve over his demise. It is extremely sad that the late President Arafat did not live to see the fulfilment of his lifelong struggle for the Palestinian cause and his dream of a free Palestine. We are convinced, like our Palestinian brothers and sisters, that his relentless efforts, perseverance and sacrifices will never be forgotten. That should not be allowed to happen.

"The departure of the late President Arafat should now motivate every Palestinian to complete the struggle that he led to fulfil the dreams and aspirations of every Palestinian. The Non-Aligned Movement calls on our Palestinian brothers and sisters to remain calm and stand united during this most difficult time to collectively address the many challenges ahead.

"We welcome the appointment of Mr. Rawhi Fattouh as the Interim President of the Palestinian Authority and the return of Mr. Ahmed Qureia as its Prime Minister. We welcome also Mr. Mahmoud Abbas as the new Chairman of the Palestine Liberation Organization. The Non-Aligned Movement extends its best wishes to the new Palestinian leadership. They can count on the Movement's unwavering support.

"We look forward to the successful holding of the Palestinian presidential election by 9 January 2005 in an orderly fashion in a calm, secure and peaceful environment. The election should provide a new beginning for Palestine and a new momentum towards the achievement of a just, comprehensive and lasting peace in the area.

"It is time that the Palestinian people be spared violence, death and suffering in their midst. The application of harsh policies and practices, as well as the excessive and disproportionate use of force by Israel against the Palestinians and other Arabs in the occupied territories, must end. These measures, which have led to injuries and deaths among children, men and women and to the destruction of homes, land and property, will not provide for the building of confidence on both sides in future.

"We mourn the loss of all innocent lives. We sympathize with the families concerned over the tragic loss of their loved ones. We extend our profound condolences to them. We reaffirm our call upon Israel to desist from targeting innocent civilians, destroying Palestinian homes and property, and impeding the freedom of movement of people in the occupied Palestinian territories, in particular during this period, when the Palestinians are preparing for elections.

"We also urge Israel to ensure that there will not be any further deterioration of the humanitarian situation and the socio-economic conditions in the occupied Palestinian territories.

"Together with other leaders in the Non-Aligned Movement, I remain hopeful that the legitimate aspiration of the Palestinian people to establish a sovereign and independent State of Palestine, with East Jerusalem as its capital, existing side by side with Israel and together with their other neighbours in peace, within secure and recognized borders, will come to fruition in 2005, as envisaged in the road map. We remain steadfast in extending our support to the Palestinian people and their leadership in their unrelenting endeavour to achieve their long-held

desire to enjoy freedom, independence and dignity, and a better future for themselves and for their children. The time to act is now. The international community must lend its support.

"The construction by Israel of the separation wall in the occupied Palestinian territories, including in and around East Jerusalem, has introduced a new dimension to the problem and could seriously endanger prospects for peace in the region. The impact of the wall on Palestinian lives is overwhelming. The wall threatens the territorial integrity of the future State of Palestine, as envisaged in Security Council resolution 1387 (2002) and upheld in the road map.

"The conclusion by the International Court of Justice, in its advisory opinion rendered last July, that the construction of the wall in the occupied territories is contrary to international law should be respected by all, and in particular by Israel. The Non-Aligned Movement urges all Member States, in particular Israel, to take all necessary measures to ensure compliance with the advisory opinion and resolution ES-10/15, adopted by the General Assembly at its resumed tenth emergency special session, on 20 July 2004. The Non-Aligned Movement also urges the Security Council to seriously look into this matter.

"Given the uncertainties prevailing in other parts of the region, the Non-Aligned Movement is convinced that serious efforts must be made to resuscitate the peace process. There is clearly no military solution to this conflict. The cycle of violence and intimidation will not produce any advantage to either side. A new resolve on the part of the parties to the conflict to resume the political process at the negotiating table is urgently required. The key to a just and durable solution lies in the willingness on the part of Israel to end its occupation of Arab lands and the fulfilment of the inalienable and legitimate rights of the Palestinian people to self-determination, national independence and sovereignty, and to return to their homes and property, from which they have been displaced and uprooted. We urge those who have the most influence to begin working towards bringing the parties to sit together in serious negotiations.

"The international community has a collective role to play in finding a solution to the Palestinian question. We must all work together to facilitate the attainment of peace in the region. The Non-Aligned Movement will continue to cooperate with the international community, particularly the members of the Quartet, towards this end. The United Nations, including the General Assembly and the Security Council, has a permanent responsibility towards the question of Palestine until it is resolved in its entirety, on the basis of the Charter and the relevant resolutions of the United Nations, international law and international humanitarian law.

"As a member of the Quartet, the United Nations is well placed to play a pivotal role towards achieving a just, comprehensive and lasting peace and towards achieving the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people. Likewise, the other members of the Quartet — the European Union, the Russian Federation and the United States — should play their roles, seize this opportunity to revive the road map, and work towards the achievement of peace.

"The valiant struggle of the Palestinian people against Israeli occupation, against the injustices suffered by them and against the inhumane treatment meted out to them must be recognized. The Palestinian people have suffered long enough. The world must express and maintain solidarity with them. The Palestinian question deserves the continued attention of the international community in the right context and within the proper perspective.

"On behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement and in my capacity as its Chairman, I should like to reiterate, on this very important day, our firm commitment towards ensuring that a just, comprehensive and lasting peaceful settlement is achieved on the question of Palestine in its entirety. Rest assured that the Non-Aligned Movement will strongly support all initiatives and efforts to address the Palestinian question — a question which has customarily been high on its agenda. We look forward to the day in the near future when the international community will join the Palestinians in celebrating the joy of their independence and statehood."

The Chairman (*spoke in French*): I thank Mr. Rastam Mohd Isa for his statement. I would ask him kindly to transmit to the Prime Minister of Malaysia, Mr. Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, in his capacity as Chairman of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries, the sincere thanks of the Committee for his very important message.

I give the floor to Mr. Ersin Erçin, Deputy Permanent Representative of Turkey to the United Nations, who will read the statement of the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Turkey, Mr. Abdullah Gül, in his capacity as Chairman of the thirty-first session of the Islamic Conference of Foreign Ministers.

Mr. Erçin (Turkey): On the solemn occasion of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People I have the distinct privilege to share with this body the message sent by Mr. Abdullah Gül, Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister of Turkey, as the Chairman of the Thirty-first Islamic Conference of Foreign Ministers, to the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People. I shall now read, in its totality, Foreign Minister Gül's message.

"On the occasion of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, I would like to express, on behalf of the Turkish Government and people and in my capacity as the Chairman of the thirty-first Islamic Conference of Foreign Ministers, the assurances of our continued support for and solidarity with the brotherly Palestinian people.

"I also would like to extend, once again, our heartfelt condolences and deepest sympathy to the Palestinian nation for the great loss of the late President Arafat. He guided the Palestinian nation throughout the long years of his leadership in their struggle for freedom, and he played a unique role in bringing the just cause of the Palestinians to the forefront.

"The last four years of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict have only brought agony and devastation to both sides. The only solution lies in a political process that would result in a comprehensive, just and lasting settlement based on two States, Israel and Palestine, living side by side in peace within secure and recognized borders.

"The Quartet's road map constitutes a unique opportunity to this end. In view of the recent developments in the region, we call upon the parties to take the necessary steps to revive the dialogue and cooperation that will lead to the resumption of the negotiations.

"We highly welcome the decision of the Palestinian side to hold presidential elections on 9 January 2005. We strongly believe that the Palestinians deserve the right to organize their elections in a proper atmosphere and in all Palestinian territories. Therefore we urge all concerned to support the Palestinian leadership and enable it to realize their praiseworthy decision.

"We also strongly believe that the current situation in the region is both a challenge and an opportunity to stop and reverse the negative trend we have unfortunately been witnessing for years.

"Now it is high time for the parties to act in conformity with their obligations and for the Quartet to directly engage in and expedite the process. Priority must be attached to assisting the Palestinians in a reform process that will also help build the future Palestinian State. We should also work to provide generous economic and humanitarian aid to the Palestinian people.

"In that direction, at the end of 2003 Turkey launched an action plan designed to increase and diversify our assistance to Palestine, and during 2004 we have started to implement the plan in the areas of health, education, professional training, food and the financial and humanitarian sectors, under the supervision of a Government-appointed coordinator.

"Turkey stands ready to assist the peace process in all aspects and to offer its helping hand to the Palestinian National Authority for the realization of the reform process.

"Lasting peace in the Middle East will not be possible until the people of Palestine gain what is rightfully theirs. Turkey pledges, as a facilitator, to continue extending her support to the parties and to the process for a comprehensive, just and lasting settlement of the question of Palestine, based on United Nations Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338

(1973), 1397 (2002) and 1515 (2003), and the principle of land for peace.

"As we again express our solidarity with the Palestinian people today, I also would like to commend the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People for their dedication to intensify the efforts to help the Palestinian just cause.

"In conclusion, on behalf of the Turkish Government and people, and as the Chairman of the thirty-first Islamic Conference of Foreign Ministers, I would like to reiterate our resolute and unwavering support for the Palestinian people. We look forward to the day when peace will finally prevail in our region.

"Please accept, Mr. Chairman, the assurances of my heartfelt wishes for the continued well-being and prosperity of the Palestinian people."

That is from Abdullah Gül, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Turkey.

The Chairman (*spoke in French*): I thank Mr. Ersin Erçin and kindly ask him to transmit to the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs of Turkey, Mr. Abdullah Gül, Chairman of the thirty-first session of the Islamic Conference of Foreign Ministers, the heartfelt thanks of the Committee for his important message.

I now give the floor to the Permanent Representative of Nigeria, Mr. Aminu Bashir Wali, who will read a message addressed to the Committee from the President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, Mr. Olusegun Obasanjo, in his capacity as Chairman of the Assembly of Heads of State and Government of the African Union.

Mr. Wali (Nigeria): I have the honour to read this message from Chief Olusegun Obasanjo, President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria and Chairman of the African Union, on the occasion of the observance of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People.

"On the occasion of the celebration of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, I wish to reiterate the unwavering support of the people of Africa for the Palestinian people in their quest for self-determination and sovereignty.

"I would also like to express the condolences of the African Union to the Palestinian people on the passing away on 11 November 2004 of President Yasser Arafat, in a military hospital in Paris. For almost four decades, the late President personified the aspirations of the Palestinian people in their struggle for a rightful place in the comity of nations. Africa will remember him as a political giant who took the bold step of signing the Oslo Accords in 1993 towards the realization of a Palestinian State living side by side in peace and security with the State of Israel. Unfortunately, his vision for an independent Palestinian State was not realized during his lifetime.

"Our thoughts also go to his close associates, as well as members of his family. We pray that his soul will find peaceful repose.

"Since its inception in May 1963, the Organization of African Unity demonstrated unwavering support for the cause of the Palestinian people. That stance has been maintained by the successor African Union, which supports a permanent solution to the Palestinian issue. It is recalled that at their summit in Lusaka in July 2001, African heads of State and Government reaffirmed, inter alia, the right of the Palestinian people to exercise their inalienable rights, including their rights to return to their homes, to recover their property, to self-determination and to the establishment of an independent State on their soil, in accordance with the principles of international law and pertinent resolutions of the United Nations.

"It is a matter of regret that the situation in the Middle East, particularly as it relates to the issue of Palestine, has deteriorated appreciably since that decision. Indeed, we have watched with concern the upsurge in violence, with the accompanying loss of innocent lives. The impact of this situation on the economic and social lives of the Palestinian people has been documented in the various reports of the relevant United Nations agencies, including the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East. That in turn has resulted in humanitarian

challenges that only true and lasting peace in the region can address.

"Therefore, the international community needs to take urgent steps to ameliorate the situation confronting the Palestinian people by fulfilling commitments made to the Palestinian cause, as outlined in past General Assembly and Security Council resolutions. We in the African Union will continue to support the efforts of the Quartet in that regard — especially the implementation of the principles of the road map — towards its vision of two States, Israel and an independent, viable and democratic Palestine, living side by side in peace and security, as affirmed by Security Council resolution 1397 (2002).

"The African Union believes that the window of opportunity provided by the acceptance of the road map in 2003 by both Israel and Palestine, as well as its subsequent endorsement by the Security Council in its resolution 1515 (2003), should be kept open. That would enable both sides to address the core issues that divide them and thereby create a basis for lasting peace and security in the Middle East region.

"The African Union reiterates that such a renewed commitment to peace and security in the region would be the best tribute that could be paid to the memory of the late Palestinian leader. The forthcoming election of a new President for the Palestinian Authority should provide both parties with an opportunity to demonstrate that commitment and thereby generate trust and confidence among the peoples of the region in a peaceful resolution of the issue at stake. That should be done in an environment of respect for international humanitarian and human rights law, including the Fourth Geneva Convention.

"The African Union is also committed to the goal of a comprehensive regional peace between Israel and Lebanon, on the one hand, and between Israel and Syria, on the other, based on the relevant Security Council resolutions, the Madrid terms of reference and the principle of land for peace. The long-suffering peoples of the Middle East deserve and should be given peace so that the urgent challenges of development can be confronted and so that the abundant resources of countries of the region can be exploited for the benefit of all their peoples. The African Union will continue to lend its support to well-conceived efforts aimed at achieving that objective.

"Finally, I convey, on behalf of the African Union, our congratulations to the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People on its untiring efforts into drawing the attention of the international community to the plight of the Palestinian people. I wish the Committee continued success in the years ahead."

The Chairman (*spoke in French*): I thank Mr. Aminu Bashir Wali and request that he convey to Mr. Olusegun Obasanjo, President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria and Chairman of the Assembly of Heads of State and Government of the African Union, the sincere thanks of the Committee for his message.

I now give the floor to Mr. Yahya Mahmassani, Permanent Observer for the League of Arab States, who will read out a message from Mr. Amre Moussa, Secretary-General of the League of Arab States.

Mr. Mahmassani (League of Arab States) (*spoke in Arabic*): I have the honour to read out a message from Mr. Amre Moussa, Secretary-General of the League of Arab States, on this day of commemoration of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People. The message reads as follows.

"I should like to thank all those present for participating in this day of commemoration of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People. I had wanted to be present at this meeting, but I had other commitments. I asked Mr. Said Kamal, Deputy Secretary-General for Palestinian Affairs of the League of Arab States, to participate in this meeting.

"Allow me at the outset to express our grief and sadness at the passing of Yasser Arafat, the leader of the Palestinian people and Palestinian revolution, who accomplished so much in the fight for freedom and independence and devoted his life to the Palestinian cause, to restoring the rights of the Palestinian people to self-determination and to creating an independent Palestinian State, with Jerusalem as its capital.

We, the League of Arab States, will always proudly remember the life of this great leader, who fought for Palestinian rights, maintaining his commitment to work with all Arab States to attain the objectives of the Palestinian people.

"I should also like to express the profound gratitude of the League of Arab States to the Chairman and the other members of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People for their intensive efforts to support the legitimate national rights of the Palestinian people in various regional and international forums. We call upon the Committee to continue those efforts, particularly at this critical time when we are witnessing an unprecedented escalation in Israeli military activities against the Palestinian people and the occupation of northern and southern Gaza and of other towns in the West Bank, causing death and injury to many hundreds of people, the destruction of thousands of houses and the razing of agricultural land in acts of brutal vengeance against the Palestinian people.

"Despite international condemnation, Israel is pursuing its policy through those acts of aggression. It is still building the separation wall, notwithstanding the clear and firm advisory opinion handed down on 9 July by the International Court of Justice, according to which the building of the wall was illegitimate, and despite the General Assembly resolution calling for an end to the building of the wall and for compensation to be given to Palestinians because of the damage caused by its construction. However, Israel still continues its attacks, despite the condemnation of the international community. That condemnation was purely theoretical, because no sanctions have been adopted against Israel, and that is why we are at a political impasse today.

"At this juncture, the Prime Minister of Israel has submitted a unilateral plan for withdrawal from Gaza and some settlements in the West Bank without coordinating Israel's efforts with the Palestinian Authority, despite our insistence on total withdrawal by Israel from the occupied Arab and Palestinian territories. Any withdrawal from Gaza must be full and comprehensive. Moreover, it must be carried out as part of the road map and must be accompanied by similar measures on the West Bank, in coordination with the Palestinian Authority.

"Israel's withdrawal, which has been approved by certain Israeli Government officials, may be a way by which Israel can avoid implementing the road map and entrench itself in the West Bank. If that is true, it would have very serious and unpredictable consequences.

"The League of Arab States and Arab countries in general have done their best to achieve a comprehensive and just peace as a strategic option. At the 2002 Beirut Summit, the League of Arab States took the historic initiative of proposing a general framework for a just and comprehensive solution to the Israeli-Palestinian problem and the Arab-Israeli conflict covering all substantive issues, such as the problems of refugees, Jerusalem and regional coexistence, in accordance with Security Council and General Assembly resolutions and the principle of land for peace. We call on the international community to support that initiative. If implemented, it could restore peace between Arabs and Israelis and put an end to tension and instability in the region.

"On this International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, I appeal to the international community as represented by the United Nations, and to all Member States and organizations, to extend all possible assistance to the Palestinian Authority, which is constantly striving to reform its institutions and prepare for legislative and presidential elections, which will provide a proper framework for a Palestinian State.

"We also call upon the Quartet to intensify its efforts to ensure that the road map is implemented unconditionally, in order to end the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and to realize President Bush's vision of the creation of a sovereign and viable Palestinian State. We call upon the United States to resume its role as a neutral honest broker in resolving the Palestinian problem because, so far, that country's prejudice in favour of Israel has only perpetuated Israel's hostility and aggression and its attacks against the Palestinian people and its national Authority. It is

impossible to reach a solution in such circumstances.

"I wish to draw attention to an important issue. The Palestinian people, who are struggling to achieve peace and put an end to violence, have made painful territorial concessions for the sake of peace, accepting those concessions in conformity with the relevant Security Council resolutions, in particular resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973). Since the Palestinian people have unreservedly agreed to the road map and the Arab peace initiative, Israel should stop imposing harsh conditions. It should dismantle its illegal settlements and begin to withdraw from the Palestinian and Arab territories, in keeping with international resolutions. It is absurd to view Israeli withdrawal from the occupied territories as a concession. We call on the international community and, in particular, the Security Council, and influential world powers to shoulder their responsibilities and provide international protection for the Palestinian people against Israel's massacres and daily attacks, and to implement the road map in order to build institutions and improve the economic and social conditions of the Palestinian people. That would have a positive impact on peace and security in the region.

"In conclusion, I wish the Committee every success in seeking to ensure the legitimate national rights of the Palestinian people, including the rights to freedom, to sovereignty and to the creation of an independent State with its capital in East Jerusalem."

The Chairman (*spoke in French*): I would ask Mr. Yahya Mahmassani to convey to the Secretary General of the League of Arab States, Mr. Amre Moussa, the sincere thanks of the Committee for his important statement.

I now give the floor to Ms. Jennifer Butler, who will make a statement on behalf of the International Coordinating Network on Palestine, an international network of civil-society organizations that cooperate closely with the Committee.

Ms. Butler (International Coordinating Network on Palestine): I would like to begin by extending the gratitude of the Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) Working Group on Israel/Palestine for the opportunity to address the Committee at this critical moment.

The NGO Working Group on Israel/Palestine is a dedicated coalition of non-governmental organizations. Our diverse membership draws individuals from three monotheistic faiths as well as from other traditions and secular organizations. We are not a think tank. We have no interest in proposing unrealistic or romanticized solutions. We have a real interest in promoting efforts that will bring about a just and lasting peace. Our member organizations have indigenous staff and local partners working on the ground, and individuals often visit the area.

It is on the basis of those experiences and our steadfast dialogue with our partners that we stand here. We bear witness to the daily reality facing the people of the land, both Palestinians and Israelis. It is easy to accept this conflict as chaos and confusion. It is easy to lose ourselves in reports and forget the daily reality in the occupied territories that is described. Reports — even ours — can only echo the painful reality that men and women experience day in and day out. For everyone on the ground, Palestinians and Israelis, their daily reality is much more insidious.

The facts are clear. The World Bank reports that at least 60 per cent of the Palestinian population lives in poverty, and that unemployment is higher than ever. Polls in the region tell us that children describe their lives as full of fear, violence and hopelessness.

As we speak, the walls grow even higher in the land: not just separation walls and security barriers, as they are called, but walls built from the fear, violence and hopelessness that plague generations. All such walls hide the humanity of those on the "other side". We cannot forget that the trauma they have experienced and lived through for generations is quite real and devastating. Our Working Group knows the voices on the ground. We know the men and women who want to challenge those impediments to the realization of a just and secure peace.

Today, we stand in solidarity with those people and voice their challenge to all such walls. Mindful of the events of the past month, we note that this meeting takes place at a critical juncture in the peace process. President Arafat was a man dedicated to the realization of a nation for his people, based on self-determination and recognition of the rights of Palestinian refugees. As Secretary-General Kofi Annan said in the General

Assembly Hall on 11 November, President Arafat "symbolized in his person" (*A/59/PV.52*) the longstanding struggle of the Palestinian people. We express our sincere condolences to his family and his community. We mourn the loss of his voice and his steadfast dedication to the search for self-determination.

Some tell us that the divisions are too deep and that there is no hope for reconciliation, but the facts say something different. There have always been people, individuals and serious organizations dedicated to finding common ground to work towards reconciliation. These movements are alive and growing in Israel and Palestine. More than ever, Palestinians and Israelis, Jews, Christians and Muslims are working together for peace. These partnerships, both in the region and around the world, are part of our Network. These groups renounce the culture of violence that has spread in our times. Why? Because when these men and women hear reports of a child killed — whether that child is in Jenin, Tel Aviv, Hebron, Haifa, Bethlehem or Jerusalem — they are outraged. We, too, are outraged. They look beyond the words, the politics and the justifications. They look to the truth: mothers weeping, siblings in fear, futures destroyed, human security obliterated. They see an innocent child who is lost in a conflict that has lasted too long. We echo their cry: "No more!" Those men, women and the next generation reach out, at times in spite of their communities, to work for a future for all children — a future that does not measure moral outrage in relation to the child's nationality or beliefs.

Time is of the essence. The United Nations and its General Assembly have been there since the beginning. Countless individuals have given their lives trying to find ways to create a secure, just and lasting peace in the region. The best way to honour them and their work is to take action. Here, again, are the facts: there is a timeline and a road map; there are political developments now that could bring people together. As NGOs, we work closely with various United Nations committees and divisions both in New York and in Geneva in order to bring to light realities on the ground. We seek to link this Organization to the people on the ground.

The General Assembly's Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices in the Occupied Territories is one such body. At a historic meeting earlier this month, NGO representatives and members of the Committee met and exchanged vital information. We agreed to research together the many facts from the ground, including issues regarding human rights violations in all communities. Such a joint effort is a way to monitor realistic expectations as we move towards a just solution. All parties agree that now is another crucial moment for action.

This body does not concern itself with a vote today. Undoubtedly there are many diverse opinions on many of the details. Can we agree that there is a need for urgent, unified action to end the occupation as a means towards sustainable peace in the region?

We said before that the humanitarian situation is dire. Our partners point to a disturbing trend of increased violence where, intentionally or not, humanitarian workers, schools, clinics and other places that should be unquestionably safe are directly impacted by violence. Those violent episodes create profound instability, enormous human insecurity and a crisis of truth.

Like others, we struggle to find the core of those problems. Violence is a common threat that undermines efforts for both justice and peace. Our NGO Working Group condemns all forms of violence. The NGO Working Group on Israel/Palestine is seized of the issue. We are not new to those concerns; nor should we abandon them as hopeless. At the same time, we have no desire to stand here a year from now and ask the same questions. Peace will take a long time to achieve, but the process starts now. We will invest our time and our expertise in seeking ways to make a substantial difference.

Participants in this meeting know the issues. We do not need to repeat them. The question of the wall was answered at The Hague earlier this year. The question of settlements has been answered continuously: the expansion of settlements is an impediment to peace. The proposed disengagement in Gaza is not a simple matter. It requires comprehensive review.

We do not need more resolutions. We need to act on those already passed. More than anything, as always, we need to concern ourselves with the people who call the land their home. We need to concern ourselves with families: the 764 Palestinian and Israeli families that have lost children in this conflict since 2000. We need to concern ourselves with the millions of children who are living.

Today we stand in solidarity: we remember the past, the struggles, the hopes, the causes of this conflict. We remember all of the facts from the ground in order to stop ourselves from moving into positions of polarized and unchecked intolerance. It is a very long road — a road that requires careful and deliberate steps. We need to respect fears, but at the same time to commend action. As we move forward, our actions must bear witness to lives lost in this conflict. For one moment, we need to be silent.

Let us allow the people who are there — the people whose lives are defined by this conflict — to speak. We hear them. They spend their days walking and driving through checkpoints, past destroyed buildings. They are surrounded by the diverse effects of occupation — and of being occupied. They spend their evenings in fearful anticipation in emergency rooms and ambulances. Are we listening? We are here because we hear their voices. From every corner of the land we hear and share their cries for justice, their prayers for peace and their deep desire for security. That is why today we stand in solidarity, and why tomorrow we will continue working for a true and just solution to the question of Palestine.

The Chairman (*spoke in French*): Through Ms. Butler I thank all the civil society organizations working tirelessly throughout the world for a peaceful, comprehensive, just and lasting solution to the question of Palestine for their valuable contribution to the work of the Committee.

It is my honour to announce that our Committee has received messages of support and solidarity from many heads of State or Government, Ministers for Foreign Affairs, Governments and international organizations. I recall that the texts of the messages will be published in a special bulletin of the Division for Palestinian Rights, but I would like to read out the list of those who sent them.

We have received messages from the heads of State of the following countries: Afghanistan, Algeria, Brazil, Brunei Darussalam, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Guinea, Indonesia, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Jordan, the Lao People's Democratic Republic, Lebanon, Mexico, Namibia, Pakistan, Qatar, Senegal, Sri Lanka, Suriname, Tunisia, Turkey, the United Arab Emirates, Viet Nam and Yemen.

We have also received messages from the heads of Government of Bangladesh, Cambodia, China, India, Lesotho and Thailand; and from the Ministers for Foreign Affairs of Argentina, Belarus, Burkina Faso, Japan, Romania, the Syrian Arab Republic and Ukraine; and from the Government of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela.

The Committee has also received messages from intergovernmental organizations such as the Commission of the African Union, the European Union and the Organization of the Islamic Conference; and from non-governmental organizations such as the Cyprus Solidarity Committee and the Committee for Israeli-Palestinian Dialogue.

Messages that we receive later will also be published in the bulletin to which I referred a moment ago.

On behalf of the Committee, I would like to express our appreciation to the heads of State or Government, Ministers for Foreign Affairs, Governments and organizations that I have just mentioned, and to all participants in today's meeting, for their persistent efforts aimed at achieving a comprehensive, just and lasting settlement of the Palestinian question, and for the support they have always given to the mandated activities of this Committee.

The statements that we have heard today and the messages of solidarity that we have received show once again the unwavering support of the international community for the renewal of peace in the Middle East and for the Palestinian people's realization of its inalienable rights on the basis of the relevant United Nations resolutions and international law. I can assure participants that all the members of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People will spare no effort in cooperating with all concerned parties and actors in order to assure that these goals are achieved.

I now have the pleasure to give the floor to Mr. Farouk Kaddoumi, head of the Political Department of the Palestine Liberation Organization.

Mr. Kaddoumi (Palestine Liberation Organization) (*spoke in Arabic*): Mr. Chairman, I would like at the outset to extend my thanks to you and to the other members of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People for your unremitting efforts to support the question of Palestine and to establish peace and security by finding

a just solution to the question of Palestine. On this occasion, we would like also to express our deep appreciation to the President of the General Assembly, Mr. Jean Ping, and to the Secretary-General, Mr. Kofi Annan, for their participation in this solemn meeting to mark the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People and for the statements they made regarding the Palestinian people, especially the condolences they extended to my people.

My thanks go also to all those who participated in today's meeting on this Day of Solidarity through the statements that were read out or through their personal participation. Their presence and participation strengthen our hope for a future that will be better than the situation we are currently facing. That complete solidarity with the Palestinian people will undoubtedly help move the peace process forward and strengthen the hopes and national aspirations of the Palestinian people.

I would like to extend my thanks to all those who have voiced their condolences on the passing of the leader of our revolution, President Yasser Arafat. When we needed his leadership most, he — God bless his soul — was a courageous leader, a hero in this struggle, remaining true to his principles and beliefs. He respected his commitments and pledges, but his struggle was with an enemy which behaved and acted quite differently. That enemy completely did away with previous agreements, failed to fulfil its commitments and imposed a siege on our leader, hoping for his surrender. The siege only strengthened his beliefs. In order to break his will, the enemy intensified its siege, but this only increased his perseverance and his strength. The fire of the Palestinian revolution continued to rage against the occupation forces in response to the unjust siege under which our courageous leader lived for three long years. The cowardly enemy was angered by this and acted treacherously against him. The loss of our leader will not weaken us. He has left behind him our young people: stronger fighters and strugglers who will, with great perseverance and determination, continue to pursue the aspirations for which our courageous leader, President Arafat, struggled.

We highly appreciate the participation in this meeting. We value all the efforts that participants have made, and we will continue on the difficult road towards peace, security and justice. We pledge that we will continue on that path in loyalty to the legacy and will of our leader. I would like to thank participants once again for the condolences they extended to us. Peace be upon you all.

The Chairman (*spoke in French*): I thank Mr. Farouk Kaddoumi for his very important statement.

Before adjourning this solemn meeting, I wish to thank everyone who made this meeting possible, in particular the members of the Division for Palestinian Rights, the Department for General Assembly and Conference Management, the Department of Public Information, the Office of Central Support Services and everyone who works behind the scenes.

I also want to remind participants that a Palestinian cultural exhibit, organized by the Committee in cooperation with the Permanent Observer Mission of Palestine, will open this evening at 6 p.m. in the public lobby of the General Assembly building. This year's exhibit, entitled "Steadfast in Palestine", will feature works by members of the League of Palestinian Artists. The opening of the exhibit will be followed by a reception, to which all are invited.

Immediately following the present meeting, two films will be screened in the Dag Hammarskjöld Library auditorium. One of these films is entitled *In the Name of Security*, and relates to a visit by a delegation of the United States National Lawyers Guild to the West Bank. The film documents what members of that delegation saw: destroyed cities and impassable checkpoints. The film describes a continuous occupation designed to prevent Palestinian statehood and tells the story of the courage of the Palestinian people. A second film, entitled *The Wall*, is about the barrier being built on Palestinian territory and its devastating effect on Palestinians being separated from their land. Participants are invited to now proceed to the film screening.

In conclusion, I would like once again to thank everyone for their participation, and to thank, in particular, the interpreters — who have given us a few extra minutes to finish our meeting in a proper fashion — the conference officers and all other conference services staff.

The meeting rose at 1 p.m.